

March 9, 2006

## **White House Deputy Drug Czar Presents Awards**

BISMARCK – At an official ceremony held earlier today in Bismarck, Scott Burns, Deputy Director of State and Local Affairs at the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), presented Attorney General Wayne Stenehjem and two of the state's Narcotics Task Forces with Distinguished Service Awards.

Stenehjem was recognized for his leadership in combating methamphetamine in North Dakota. Stenehjem's drug enforcement initiatives, including retail restrictions on over the counter products used to manufacture meth and harsher criminal penalties for meth cooks, have been credited for the dramatic drop in meth labs. Since the laws took effect in June 2005, meth lab busts have decreased every month compared to the previous year. There have been only 3 meth lab busts to date this year, compared to more than 50 for the same period last year.

"In North Dakota we are fortunate because we know how to work together. We share a common goal – to eradicate the use and distribution of illegal drugs. As a team we have been successful, and as a team we will continue to be successful. I am deeply moved to receive this recognition, but I want to emphasize that this is, and will continue to be, a joint effort," commented Stenehjem.

Scott Burns presented Distinguished Service awards to the Grand Forks Narcotics Task Force (NTF) and the Northwest NTF in recognition of drug enforcement efforts relating to methamphetamine. Burns praised the Grand Forks NTF for its efforts in disrupting drug trafficking. A recent investigation by the Grand Forks NTF uncovered a national drug trafficking organization dealing methamphetamine and heroin for cash and weapons. Working with federal drug enforcement agents, the task force's investigation led to the seizure of 50 firearms and the arrest of three individuals who are now awaiting trial. Burns commended the Northwest NTF for its ongoing efforts to reduce the manufacture and use of methamphetamine in the local area. For the past four years, the Northwest NTF has led the state for the number of meth lab busts.

Williams County Sheriff Scott Busching and Williston Police Chief Don Wentz accepted the award on behalf of the Northwest NTF. Walsh County Sheriff Lauren Wild and Sgt. Thomas Murphy from the Grand Forks Police Department received the award for the Grand Forks NTF. The Northwest NTF is comprised of officers and agents from the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, the Williams, Divide and McKenzie County Sheriff's Offices and Williston, Watford City, and Crosby Police Departments. The Grand Forks Narcotics Task Force includes the North Dakota Bureau of Criminal Investigation, Grand Forks Police Department, Grand Forks, Walsh and Pembina County Sheriff's Departments, North Dakota Army National Guard, and US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).